

Georgians may have too pessimistic a view of their own country. As a recent pre-electoral assessment from the National Democratic Institute (NDI) points out, Georgia has implemented several key democratic reforms in recent years. New institutions ensure the accuracy of the voters' list or regulate party financing. Amendments to the electoral code in late 2011 and early 2012 introduced a raft of positive changes although the failure to redraw electoral districts (which range from 6,000 to 158,000 voters) means some votes are worth less than others. Recent "must carry" provisions will improve opposition parties' access to the media by obliging cable providers to transmit all television channels with news programmes during the sixty-day campaign period. In all, the "2012 electoral process is more formalised and regulated compared to past elections", the NDI concludes.

Even so, the dark side of Georgian politics, which Thomas de Waal has likened to "a blood feud", has been all too evident since Mr. Ivanishvili entered politics in October last year. Georgia's richest man remains without Georgian citizenship, an absurd situation of which most of his compatriots disapprove; the sooner that is resolved, the better. The Chamber of Control stands accused of levying disproportionate fines on the Georgian Dream movement, which Mr. Ivanishvili has refused to pay. (It has responded by seizing some of his assets). And before Parliament adopted the must carry provisions, Channel 9, a new television station co-owned by Mr. Ivanishvili's wife, and Global TV, the only broadcaster that carried it, suffered from almost continuous harassment.

Both sides continue to vilify each other, complaining of harassment, improper campaign spending, attempted bribery of state officials and abuse of administrative resources. A debate in the European Parliament on 4th July about Georgian politics reached similar extremes. As punch-ups during Georgian Dream campaign meetings in the central Georgian villages of Mereti on 26th June and Kareleti on 12th July suggest, it could get nastier still.

Yet Mr. Ivanishvili's political awakening has also awoken Georgian voters. Huge, peaceful rallies have taken place across the country, far beyond anything seen in recent years. Many more Georgians (75%) now plan to vote in October's elections than intended to so in September last year (51%), polls show. And the political debate is increasingly focused on issues that matter to ordinary Georgians, not just personalities.

Georgian Dream unveiled some of their plans in May: cutting utility costs, investing in agriculture, free universal health insurance and increased pensions. Vano Merabishvili, the former interior minister who became prime minister in late June, announced the government's four-year post-election programme shortly after taking office. He too wants to boost pensions, provide universal health insurance, and invest in agriculture. Mr. Merabishvili has also set up a new ministry to tackle unemployment (roughly 34% of Georgians say they are unemployed, compared with an official rate unemployment rate of 16%), and promises to provide each family with vouchers worth \$600.

Does Mr. Merabishvili's appointment indicate that Mikheil Saakashvili, the president, is unlikely to become prime minister once his term in office expires in early 2013? As one of the few big beasts of Georgian politics, Mr. Merabishvili would certainly be hard to shove aside. At any rate, slightly more Georgians would oppose such a job-swap à la Putin than would approve of it.

Reassuringly, 55% of Georgians surveyed think the elections will be well conducted,

and only 21% fear falsification. But there is little room for complacency. Mr. Ivanishvili has said that if he has any evidence of vote-rigging by the authorities, he will call for street protests. For most foreign observers, and many Georgians, that would be a step backwards. Yet 27% of those polled say he would be justified in doing so. Come October, that sentiment could matter.

While most Georgians are focused on who will win, Georgia's allies say the credibility of the electoral process is key. As the NDI states, "further development of democratic institutions and practices offer the best chance for western integration and for long-term prosperity and stability." With the political temperature likely to rise further in coming months, Georgia's politicians would do well to bear that in mind. Will they?

IN HONOR OF ALEXANDER COCKBURN

HON. DENNIS J. KUCINICH

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, August 2, 2012

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in honor of Alexander Cockburn, the bold Irish-American journalist who passed away after a courageous, private battle with cancer. He left this world on Saturday, July 21, 2012 at the youthful age of 71.

Alexander Cockburn was born in Scotland on June 6, 1941 and spent most of his childhood living in Ireland. He attended the University of Oxford and earned a degree in English literature and language in 1963. Alexander became a permanent resident of the United States in 1973, where he wrote for several noteworthy publications. He spent his first ten years in the U.S. writing for *The Village Voice*, an alternative weekly magazine based in New York City. He then became a writer for *The Nation* until the time of his death, in addition to a variety of publications including *The Wall Street Journal* and *New York Press*. Alexander was also the co-editor of *CounterPunch*, a newsletter in which he frequently expressed his controversial, unfiltered opinions for which he became renowned and deeply respected.

Friends and co-workers remember Alexander for his remarkable talents. He could quickly write dazzling columns that were full of passion and conviction. He was unafraid to speak his mind, often writing in opposition to his colleagues at the same publications. His bold style set him apart as a truly remarkable journalist.

Alexander died on July 21, two years after he was diagnosed with cancer. He kept his illness a secret and continued to write until the day of his death, refusing to let cancer get in the way of his passion. He will be missed by his family, friends, and many readers.

Mr. Speaker and colleagues, please join me in honoring Alexander Cockburn, the talented journalist and audacious man who has left a lasting legacy on the world of literature and the world at large.

TRIBUTE TO CPL MARCUS W. DANDREA, UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

HON. ANDER CRENSHAW

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, August 2, 2012

Mr. CRENSHAW. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor one of Florida's brightest sons, Corporal Marcus W. Dandrea, United States Marine Corps, from Jacksonville. On February 24th of this year, CPL Dandrea, a member of Charlie Company, stepped on a pressure plate while patrolling a mountain top in Sangin, Helmond Province. His recovery has been fast and furious, as he is already moving to start the next phase of his already inspiring life. However, his U.S. Marine Corps active duty service will continue through his wife, Lance Corporal Victoria Dandrea. They have three children, Naomi, DJ, and Micah. I ask that this poem, penned in their honor by Albert Caswell, be placed in the RECORD.

INTEL

Intel . . .
In every battle . . .
And in every fight . . .
And in every war,
there is but such need to so bring such insight!
Intel . . . Intelligence,
is what a war's life blood so ignites . . .
leading us all to victory by shedding such light!
To illuminate the darkness of war,
to burn bright!
For there are but only a few who so gather
such insights . . .
For there are The Ph.D's of the battlefield
who fight . . .
The men who are but armed with mind of
might,
and with heart's of steel in sight!
Top Secret!
The United States Marine!
One of our brightest of all shades of green!
Jar Heads,
who with such Intelligence so fight . . . and
so convene!
Where Technology So Meets Might!
Saving lives,
but with all of the knowledge that they so
provide . . .
As from all of this,
such battle plans are so devised!
As many times,
making the difference between death and
life!
Darkness or Light!
So that out across a Nation,
a mother will not have to so cry this night!
As warriors drop in from no where,
from out of sight!
For they are both beauty and the beast,
all at their height!
Fighting with their brains and bodies,
oh what an awesome sight!
Putting, The Stealth in Technology!
As how wars are won,
all in the cover of day and or night . . .
As when it all so depends on who lives or dies
As is the high cost so compromised!
As that's where you will find,
all of their most magnificent of all silent
battle cries!
As it was out on such a secret mission,
when this young Marine's life would almost
not reach its fruition!
As an IED went off,
as so close to death he'd lie!
As right there but on its very edge,
as when Marcus so reached so deep down
with something so left inside!